

Arlington

MASTER COMPOSTERS

Forty-seventh Edition

February 2006

The *MASTER COMPOSTER* Program of Arlington is in partnership with Texas to dramatically decrease yard and household waste going to landfills by inspiring and educating our citizens to reduce, recycle, and reuse.

Wormshop

Please make plans to attend our first meeting of the new year!

7:00 p.m. Thursday, March 9
Municipal Office Tower
201 E. Abram Street
2nd Floor

Please join us for our annual "WORMSHOP." As in the past, this will be the first meeting for all of the new master composter interns. And once again, Hugh Ross will be our guest speaker and "provider of worms."

John and Frances Presson: 2005 Volunteers of the Year

Congratulations to the Pressons who were recognized at the Christmas luncheon in December as the 2005 Arlington Master Composter Volunteers of the Year.

The Pressons joined the Master Composter Program in February of 2003. Since then, they have helped in so many ways. From Computer RoundUps to turning monstrous piles at Tierra Verde, no job is too big or too small. It has been an honor working with and getting to know the Pressons. They are a true asset to our program and our community.



Mayor and City Council Resolve to Recycle

With help from the Office of Communication, Lorrie Anderle kicked off a new recycling education

and awareness campaign in 2006.

At their January 10 meeting, the Mayor and City Council members expressed their resolve to recycle, with a special proclamation that encouraged all city leaders, employees and citizens to pledge their participation in the City's curbside recycling program.

Other components of the campaign include a new public service announcement about the benefits of recycling (featuring our very own Jane Borland) has been produced and began airing earlier this month. Newspaper advertisements, the City of Arlington website and the Arlington Update cable program are also being utilized to get the word out to residents.

The Mayor recycles, do you?



Mayor Robert Cluck was joined by (left to right) Assistant Director of Community Services Mike Bass, The Minimizer, Recycling Coordinator Lorrie Anderle and Director of Community Services Lee Hitchcock as he and City Council members resolved to recycle.

2005 Annual Christmas and Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon



With over 40 in attendance, the annual Christmas luncheon was a huge success.

For those who couldn't make it, once again the wonderful atmosphere and hospitality of the staff at the Oasis on Joe Pool Lake added a little something special to the celebration.

To everyone who joined us, thanks for coming and allowing the City of Arlington to say THANKS for being such great volunteers.



Compost Chat and Chew — by Jane Borland

Hello compost friends,

Headlines for January 19, 2006 read: AUSTIN — Gov. Rick Perry today declared a disaster in all 254 Texas counties due to severe drought conditions, and requested that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency provide disaster relief assistance for Texas farms and ranches that have suffered economic and physical losses as a result. Our average rainfall for this area is 32 to 34 inches a year. At the end of December, we were about 16 inches short. Simply translated, unless we get a lot of rain in a hurry, we are facing extreme drought conditions not unlike those seen with the ever-famous Dust Bowl. Years of unwise tillage, followed by strong winds and drought blew away miles of fertile topsoil from the country's central plains between 1930 and 1935. It was the stuff of which movies were made. Lives were broken or reshaped as farmers were ruined, forced to move, or forced to give up farming altogether. It affected 97 million acres of land, including the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles and parts of Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. The harvest of 1933 was dismal. The dust storms were followed by plagues of spiders, grasshoppers, and jackrabbits. One of the worst dust storms, on April 14, 1933, in Pampa, Texas, caused Woody Guthrie to pen the song "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You."

The term *dust bowl* was coined by Associated Press reporter Robert Geiger, writing from Guymon, Oklahoma. So what does this mean to us as gardeners and small time farmers?

Plants drink their food. If your soil dries out, they starve — or wilt. Gardeners in many regions of the country are advised to prepare ahead for a dry growing season, especially toward harvest time. Prolonged drought stress to plants is unhealthy and predisposes them to pest problems. A plant under drought stress is in a weakened state and its defenses are low. Insects and diseases take advantage of the situation and add to the plants' stress. The result is often observed the following

season with pest damage that seemed to appear overnight. When in reality the problem started the previous season during or following the drought. The solution is to avoid prolonged drought conditions through proper watering. Below are some practical things that might help all of us keep our gardens and yards healthy in this tough period.

Cultural Practices

Plan, plan, plan. Every good garden begins with a good design. So, as you consider view, exposure, function and all the other elements of design, think water, too. To save water, group plants with similar water needs. Place plants with the highest water needs closest to your water sources. Wrestling hoses or endless buckets out to far-flung thirsty plants is my least favorite garden chore.

Plan a smaller garden. It's so tempting to plant all those bean or zucchini seeds in the spring, even though they'll produce enough food to feed the neighborhood. Take stock of what you really need to grow and don't exceed your calculation. For example, two or three hills of zucchini and cucumbers will easily meet the needs of a family of four.

Choose bush varieties. Plants that grow low to the soil will lose less water through transpiration than those that spread rampantly or twine up to the sky. Check descriptions in seed catalogs for varieties that need little space and can tolerate dry conditions. Space bush varieties close together. Leaves from neighboring plants will shade the soil, helping to conserve surface moisture and reduce weed growth. Plant beans about an inch apart, tomatoes about 18 inches apart.

Strip Off Leaves. Large, bushy tomato plants lose a lot of water through their leaves. Once the green tomatoes reach full size, strip off most of the leaves to reduce evaporation and keep water going to the ripening fruit.

Harvest at Once. As soon as a fruit or vegetable is ripe, remove it from the plant. Pull up any plants that

aren't productive or that are past their prime.

How you plant is nearly as important as what you plant. Plant trees and shrubs in mass plantings. Prepared beds allow for greater root spread and water take-up, plus grouped plantings look better. Also, plant in spring or fall when it takes less water to get plants established.

Use wider spacing for flowers to reduce competition for soil moisture, mulching in between plants.

Mulch your beds. Use 3 to 4 inches (after settling) of organic mulch (pine bark, straw or similar) to prevent soil from drying and losing moisture to the air. Keep such mulch away from trunks, and off the top of desirable perennials. Plastic mulches in vegetable and annual flower gardens in which plants are spaced regularly, or around shrubs, can help as well. Or use thick layers of newspapers in rows, covered lightly with mulch.

Proper soil preparation is a major water-conservation measure. Rainwater runs through pure sand at the rate of 20 inches an hour or even faster, taking with it everything plants need to survive. Soil with lots of organic matter slows the transition of water from the soil to the subsoil, giving plants a chance to take in what they need. Add lots of peat moss and compost at planting time. Compost also adds nutrients, but breaks down faster than peat moss. Peat moss lasts longer in the soil, at least a year or more, but adds few nutrients and acidifies the soil. Water absorbent materials (hydrogels) can help dry sandy soils.

Fertilize less, both less in amount and less often, and avoid too much high nitrogen fertilizer. Too much nitrogen results in excessive growth, and need for water by plants. Organic fertilizers provide less, and over a longer period usually, and they help soil humus which helps hold water.

Choose and place plants properly. Don't choose plants that prefer moist, and place them in a dry area. And choose plants more resistant to drought. There are many other plants other than cacti and succulents such

as those with deep tap roots (baptisia or false lupine), thick storage roots (daylilies), or those with waxy-coated leaves (sedum). Perennial flowers need water when newly planted, but once established require much less water than annual flowers. Native plants may be a good choice as well.

Don't apply pesticides that might cause injury to stressed plants, or in heat, or that need to be watered in.

Avoid pruning when plants are stressed and not growing, and so unable to heal wounds quickly. Pruning also may stimulate side shoots and more growth, and so more need for water.

For evergreens, use anti-transpirant sprays on leaves that help prevent water loss. Or erect windbreaks around such plants, if they're small or new and in a windy area. Burlap strung between posts is effective. For routinely windy sites, consider planting a more permanent windbreak to screen other plantings.

Use hoeing and soil cultivation of weeds sparingly. Continually disturbing the soil surface will result in it drying out much faster. You may have to merely cut weeds off at the soil surface, or use contact or systemic herbicides, and save the cultivation until drought conditions ease. At least the bright side is that under drought, weeds won't grow as fast either! But keep weeds down, as they compete with more desirable plants for water.

Watering

Water infrequently, slowly and deeper. Frequent light watering encourages shallow root growth and weeds. Water for a longer duration less often. Water only when necessary, based on the condition of the plants rather than a fixed schedule. Don't panic over a little droopiness. Remember, most plants wilt in hot sun, then recover.

Timing is everything. Water in the early morning since you lose nearly half of the water to evaporation in the heat of day. And when you do water, water deeply. Watering only when needed and thoroughly produces deep-rooted plants that are more water efficient and drought enduring.

Practice appropriate maintenance. Keep your irrigation systems

running properly. A leaky hose can waste gallons upon gallons of water.

Use a Drip System. Drip irrigation is more water-thrifty than sprinklers. If you install a drip system, allow for different beds or separate parts of the garden to be on a separate set of commands. The water needs of plants differ widely, and a system that delivers one rate of water to your entire property can be wasteful.

Roll out the Rain Barrel. A mere 1/8 inch of rain on an average roof will fill a 60 gallon rain barrel. The Great American Rain Barrel Company sells a 60-gallon-capacity polyethylene barrel for \$95.50. It comes complete with an overflow fitting, drain plug, screw-on cover, and threaded spigot positioned 14 inches from ground level. Attach your hose to the spigot and water your garden. For additional water storage, link several barrels together with garden hose (3 + for \$89.50 each) or add a diverter and channel water directly from your downspout into your barrel. For more information, contact the Great American Rain Barrel Company, Inc., 295 Maverick St., East Boston, MA 02128, or call 800-251-2352 or check them out on the internet at www.composters.com/docs/rainbarrels.html. For other manufacturers, do an internet search for rain barrels.

Make your own watering devices. Create mini-reservoirs for tomatoes and peppers from plastic milk jugs or well scrubbed bleach bottles: With a sharp knife cut several small X-shaped holes in the bottom, bury about half of the jug in soil between two plants, and refill as needed. The water will seep slowly and deeply down to where the plants' roots can use it most.

Unglazed 1.5-gallon clay pots also make good reservoirs. Plug the bottom hole with a stopper or caulk; you want the water to leach slowly through the porous pot walls, not through the bottom. To use for melons or squash, prepare soil for planting and create pits 24 inches across and five inches deep. Fill each pit with rich soil and bury a clay pot in the center, its mouth level with the ground. Fill the pot with water and cover the top with a tile or an old slate shingle, or an old pot lid — anything that will prevent evaporation. Weight the top with a

brick, if necessary. Plant four seeds around the pot. Check the water level periodically and fill to the brim when the level falls.

Lawns

Limit the size of your lawn. How much lawn do you really need? Lawns require more time, effort and water than most other parts of your landscape. So, reduce the size of your lawn. Instead, plant drought resistant ground covers, native plants or low maintenance trees and shrubs. Leave grass clippings to act as mulch and to recycle nutrients and moisture.

If seeding lawn areas, or repairing areas, use drought resistant grass types such as fine fescues.

If water is not available, allow grass to go dormant. Unless extreme conditions last for a long period, it will usually begin growing again once conditions improve.

Don't mow grass when it is dormant and not growing. Even when growing, set the mower height at 2 to 3 inches high. High mown grass develops deeper root systems that are better able to withstand drought.

If water is restricted or in short supply, give highest priority to the following:

- Newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials
- Newly seeded lawns or repaired lawn areas
- Plants on sandy soils or windy and exposed sites
- Vegetables when flowering

In closing, water conservation is important whether we are in the midst of a drought or not, since water is a limited resource. Over half of the water we use goes into our landscapes, so it makes sense to look for ways to save water as we garden. I hope that there are some ideas here that will help all of us be better stewards of our precious water supply while allowing us to enjoy gardening, even when it is dry, and I hope we see much needed rain in the days and months to come.

So, until next time, get out there and make a big pile of compost for your beds.

— Jane Borland

A Message from the Backyard Compost Coordinator

In its 9th year, the Arlington Master Composter program has accomplished so much. And as we begin the new year, I look forward to working with all of my fellow compost comrades to accomplish even more.

Just to keep everyone posted on what's been going on here at "the City," we were notified last week that city management is reorganizing several departments, including "mine."



Recycling will no longer be a part of Neighborhood Services, it will be part of Environmental Services instead. Environmental Services will include solid waste services, air and water quality, public health, the new natural gas program, stormwater, and fleet services. At this point, I do not know where my office is going to be; only that I will be moving from the 7th floor of the Municipal Office Tower. But, I promise to keep you posted.

I hope to see everyone at the annual wormshop in March to help welcome the new master composter interns.

— Lorrie

Texas Recycles Day

As many of you know, the City of Arlington recognized Texas Recycles Day in November by once again hosting a computer and electronics collection event. A total of 541 citizens took advantage of the event which was held at UTA from 8 am to 12 noon. As a result, over 24 tons of old computers and other electronics were taken to Goodwill Industries of Fort Worth. And approximately 150 cell phones were collected to help raise funds for R.U.F.F. A special thanks to John and Frances Presson for helping at the event.

DO I OWE YOU A COMPOST BIN?

If so, please contact me.
I just received a new shipment
last week.
Thanks, Lorrie

Master Composter Workshop

The annual Master Composter Workshop is scheduled for February 24 and 25. Please tell anyone interested in learning more about the class to visit our web site at www.ci.arlington.tx.us or call 817-459-6778.



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